

Jesus at the Temple

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Please turn with me again to the passage we read in Matthew chapter 21 as we continue our series in Matthew's Gospel.

There are times in the Gospel of Matthew where we encounter a Jesus we almost don't recognize. Times when he seems to do things or say things, shall we say, out of character.

The Jesus we know is gentle and meek, far from the man who overturns tables and throws people out of the temple. Perhaps we're comfortable with a Jesus who heals the sick and receives the praises of children.

But we're uncomfortable with a Jesus who upsets the smooth running of a religious institution. The problem, of course, is entirely ours. Jesus refuses to be boxed in by our cozy views of him.

And it's for us to fit in with him, not for him to fit in with us. It's for us to change our minds, not for him to change his mission.

[1 : 13] Now, Matthew 21 verses 12 through 17 is an incredibly important passage. Straight off the heels of the triumphal entry where Jesus is acknowledged by the Jerusalem crowds as Israel's Messiah, Jesus makes a beeline for the temple.

The temple being the heart of Israel's religion. The tension is building. It's the beginning of Passover week. And Jerusalem is filling up with Jews from all over the world.

Religious and nationalistic fervor is growing. And it's all centered here in one place. The temple. What shall happen?

And we read that when Jesus went into the temple, he threw out all those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and those selling doves.

Having caused such a commotion, Jesus then heals the blind and the lame and then receives the praises of Jerusalem's children. This passage is so important because it reinforces our understanding of the centrality of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 27] Christianity does not consist in buildings, rituals, or sacrifices, but in a person. Jesus Christ. Those first century Jews to whom Matthew was writing needed to know that Jesus Christ, and not the temple, is the heart of God's purposes for the world.

And that it's through him we pray to God. In him we find healing from God. And by him we worship God. In AD 70, just a few years after Matthew wrote this gospel, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

More about that next week. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Jesus through whom we pray to God. In whom we find healing from God.

And by whom we worship God. I want us to consider two things from our passage today. First, Jesus is the new temple. And secondly, Jesus and the new temple.

Perhaps this isn't a Jesus that you're all too comfortable with. But again, it's not for him to fit in with us. It is for us to fit in with him.

[3 : 42] Is Jesus Christ the heart of your faith? Does your religion consist in external duties for Jesus Christ? Or in inward communion with Jesus Christ?

First of all then, Jesus is the new temple. Jesus is the new temple. It is hard for us to underestimate just how crucial the temple of Jerusalem was to the religion of Israel's people.

Passover, the Jews from all over the world would come together to remember how God had rescued their ancestors from slavery in Egypt would worship God.

Their history, their identity was wrapped up in this temple. But even more than this, God was present in this temple. This was his earthly throne where sacrifices were rewarded with forgiveness and worship was received with favor.

This is the temple. The temple is Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, and St. Paul's Cathedral all rolled into one. This is what it meant to be Jewish.

[4 : 57] The temple is at the heart of your religion. It's your culture. It's your life. It's your religion. It's your identity as a religious Jew. And in these verses, Jesus is both literally and metaphorically overturning the tables.

Because he, and not the table, is to be at the heart of Israel's religion. He, the Messiah, not the temple. He is the living presence of God with his people.

Through him there will be forgiveness for all who believe. Wherever he is, God is. As Jesus extends his hand in compassion, God is expressing his love for a broken humanity.

When Jesus pronounces forgiveness of sin, God is removing a man's guilt. Jesus is the new temple by whom and through whom the temple in Jerusalem has become redundant and empty.

I want us to focus on two elements of how Jesus, the Messiah, replaces all the ceremonies, all the fixtures, all the sacrifices of the Jerusalem temple.

[6 : 08] First of all, he is the savior of God's people. And then he is the salvation of God's people. Now why I'm laboring this point is not merely because the New Testament writers, especially the writer to the Hebrews, builds his entire argument upon this passage.

But because as Christians, we need to find our identity, not in ceremonies, but in Christ. Not in buildings, but in Jesus. Not in what we do for him, but in what he's done for us.

First of all, he is the savior of God's people. The savior of God's people. In Jesus' day, the temple served many functions.

Not the least was it provided a safe space for Jewish nationalists to talk about how they were going to get rid of the Romans. By agreement, Roman Gentiles were not allowed into the temple.

And so these Jewish nationalists were free to dream and make plans. In verse 13, the word the NIV translates as robbers or thieves is more accurately translated as insurrectionists or rebels.

[7 : 25] Now the temples were Jewish nationalists. Nationalists hung out, plotting terrorist attacks against the Romans and planning their overthrow.

They longed for the days of David and Solomon when Israel was free from foreign control and pagan influences. And these nationalists thought that they could achieve the salvation of Israel by military means.

By guerrilla warfare. By weighing down the Roman legions with endless terrorist attacks. So these Jewish nationalists, of whom there were many, they met in the temple not to pray, but to plot.

Not to worship God, but to wage war on Rome. They thought that the salvation of God's people could only be achieved through worldly force or military achievement.

Their vision of the kingdom was entirely Jewish. A Jewish king commanding Jewish armies and ruling over a Jewish empire. The temple in Jerusalem had become a den of nationalist terrorists.

[8 : 38] But you know, they weren't so different from many in the Israel of the day. The people who had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem in the previous passage and called out Hosanna to the son of David thought the same way.

Even the majority of Jesus' kingdom would be an earthly empire. But it was in the temple, especially at this time of Passover when people are thinking of how God saved his people from the mighty Egyptian empire.

The Jewish nationalists are gathering together and plotting how they can overthrow the Roman empire. Forget prayer. For them, the temple is about politics.

Forget worship. For them, the temple is about war. For them, the temple is about glory. For them, the temple is about glory.

The enemy shall be defeated not by military force, but by God's love demonstrated on the cross.

Jesus quotes from Jeremiah 7 verse 11 in calling the Jerusalem temple a den of thieves.

[10 : 18] Back in Jeremiah's day, the people of Israel genuinely believed that as long as the temple stood, Israel's enemies would never defeat them.

They placed their trust in the temple. They placed their trust in the temple of God and not in the God of the temple. And it wasn't so different for these Jewish nationalists in Jesus' day.

Jesus' presence here in the temple, you see, it's a challenge to them. In whom shall you trust for Israel's salvation? Israel's armies or Israel's God?

Israel's manpower or Israel's Messiah? Now, last time I checked, we don't host political meetings, especially of the violent kind in our church, nor ever shall we.

We do not come here to foment rebellion against our civil government. We come here to pray for our civil government. The power we seek is spiritual.

[11:22] The salvation we come here to discover is heavenly. Forget the politics. That's not the application of this passage in our Scottish context. The application is this.

What, or more importantly, who is at the heart of your faith? Is it Christianity or is it Christ? Is it your duties or is it Jesus? It comes back to this, this ultra-crucial question. Who is my Savior? From where does my salvation come? If it's me, my works, my religion, anything to do with me at all, then Jesus comes this morning through his word to overturn our tables.

It must be all Jesus Christ or none at all. So which is it for you? The Savior of God's people.

[12:25] But the second aspect of Jesus as the new temple is the salvation of God's people. The salvation of God's people. We tend to think of the temple in Jerusalem as a rather quiet place, but it wasn't.

It was a scene of horrific sacrifices, of the unparalleled slaughter of animals. Such is the cost of human sin that it costs. It costs the blood of lambs and bulls and goats.

Their blood is drained from their bodies and their corpses are burned. A righteous Jew would bring an animal to the temple in Jerusalem, and he would sacrifice that animal to take away his sins.

But since most of the Jews who came to Jerusalem came from very far away, they would buy a sacrifice when they arrived in the city. That's why there were merchants in the temple.

They were selling lambs. They were selling doves. And because many of the Jews who were in Jerusalem at Passover time did not come from Israel, but from all over the Greek world, they needed their local currency changed into Jewish shekels, I guess.

[13:37] That's why there were money changers in the temple, changing from foreign currencies to Jewish currencies, so that they could buy a sacrifice. Of course, both merchants and money changers took their slice of the profit, but both provided an important service.

Without them, animal sacrifice would not take place, and therefore the sins of God's people would not be forgiven. The first thing Jesus does when he comes into the temple is to throw out all those who are buying and selling.

He overturns the tables of the money changers and those selling doves for sacrifice. I don't believe that in this instance, Jesus is challenging the market capitalism of the temple.

Rather, by overturning the tables and by ridding the temple of its merchants, he is making the strongest statement possible that the sacrificial system involving the slaughter of animals is over.

The age-old practice of animals being offered up to make atonement for the sins of God's people is finished. At this Passover time, when people offer sacrifices in memory of lambs, which were slaughtered on that first Passover night, Jesus is doing away with animal sacrifice and replacing it with the once-for-all sacrifice of himself.

[15:07] I think this is a fair reading of the text. This is the first day of Passover week. People's minds are reflecting on how it was through the blood of sacrificed lambs, their firstborn were rescued in Egypt.

And now the firstborn son of Mary enters the temple and by overturning the tables of the money changers ends that practice of animal sacrifice. No longer will animals be slaughtered on account of their owners.

Rather, Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be slaughtered on account of the sins of the world. Salvation is no longer about the terror of the temple, but about the cross of Calvary.

As the Apostle Paul will later say in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7, Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

In Christ, you see, the temple is emptied of its purpose, which was where atonement was made for the sins of the people through the blood of animal sacrifice.

[16:20] The temple is now the body and the blood of Christ. And so again, the question resolves down into this for us. Where do we find our salvation?

Not just as Jesus our Savior, he is also our salvation, for it's in him, and through his death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven, and we are freely given eternal life.

Our forgiveness is assured, not in a building, but through a body crucified for us. Atonement is made, not in a building, but through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, the new temple of God.

Once again, do we find salvation in what we offer God, in what we do for him, or in what God has already done for us, in Christ?

I wonder whether now we can begin to understand why Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers in the temple and caused such a ferocity.

[17 : 26] It's because he's proclaiming to the world. He is the Savior, and salvation is found nowhere else than in him.

That he is the Lamb of God, who through his death in just a few days' time, will take away the sins of the world. There's another reason which we'll look at next week, but this is the main teaching point.

Jesus is replacing the temple with himself. And perhaps now you can understand why many of those religious Jews wanted him dead. Because in their minds, what he did this day was blasphemy and sacrilege.

We read in verse 15, that they were indignant. But for us, Jesus Christ is life and health.

It means the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, which no matter how many animals were slaughtered, we could never have attained to before. Jesus is our Savior and our salvation.

[18 : 34] That's why this passage in Matthew 21 is so very important. Jesus is the new temple. Secondly, and far more briefly, Jesus and the new temple.

Jesus and the new temple. If Jesus is replacing the temple building with his own body and his own blood, if Jesus is the new temple of God, then that carries powerful implications for us as Christians. If Jesus is our Savior and our salvation, there are consequences for us as believers in Christ. In our passage, there are three. Prayer to God is now made through him.

Healing from God now comes from him. And worship toward God is now directed through him. First of all, prayer to God.

In verse 13, as he overturns the tables of the money changers, he calls out, my house will be called a house of prayer. Notice how Jesus calls the temple here, my house.

[19 : 44] And I guess, from a purely common sense perspective, if the temple is Jesus' house, then he has a right to rearrange the furniture in whatever way he sees fit.

But in the context, Jesus is criticizing the nationalistic Jews for the way in which they use the temple to plot against the Romans, rather than a place where they pray to God.

But now there's far more to it than that. Because by his actions, Jesus is proclaiming that prayer to God is only to be made through him.

That only in him, and not in a building, is there access to God. And that only in him does God respond and answer our prayers.

This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. That it says, God's people pray in the name of Jesus, God will hear an answer. It fell to the Apostle John to expound this principle and to recall what Jesus said.

[20 : 48] I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. We no longer need to be present in a building called the temple or the church to have access to God in prayer.

Rather, it is in Christ Jesus and through what he has done in his cross and resurrection. No Jesus, no prayer.

That's what it means to pray in the name of a Jesus who is both our Savior and our salvation. That in him and through him only we have access to God to lay our requests before him.

Prayer to God. Second application, healing from God. Healing from God. On first inspection, verse 14 is very much out of place.

On one hand, it breaks the flow of Jesus over turning of the tables. On the other hand, the blind and the lame, because they were ritually unclean, were not allowed in the temple in the first place.

[21 : 53] Their disabilities in the minds of the Jews disqualified them from being able to worship and pray in the temple. But nevertheless, here they are as we read. They came to him at the temple.

The clear inference is that they weren't there before, but it was only when Jesus arrived they began to come to him. And we read, he healed them.

The temple had never seen anything like this before. That the blind and the lame found healing there. The temple had been a place of death, not life. But now, through Jesus Christ, the new temple of God, the blind are given their sight and the lame can walk.

And again, this is the consistent teaching of the New Testament that healing from God comes only through Jesus Christ. Jesus, our saviour and salvation is he in whom we find healing and wholeness from God.

Our broken hearts are bound up. Our broken minds are repaired. Our broken souls find rest. The therapeutic touch of God comes not by association with a building or with an organisation, but through faith in Jesus Christ, our saviour and salvation.

[23 : 16] And so I'm asking, are you broken today? In what way are you broken? There's only one place you can go. The place where you least expect, perhaps, to be received.

The merciful, powerful, loving touch of Jesus Christ through faith. And then thirdly, it is through Jesus that we are to offer worship to God.

And I'm sure I'm not making enough of this passage in this respect, but the temple may have been filled with the screaming of dying animals, but it was also filled with the songs of Israel's worshippers.

Great choirs and orchestras played, and their constant refrain was that of the Old Testament. Give thanks to God, give thanks to the Lord, his steadfast love endures always.

They would sing the psalms, the harps would sound, and they would worship God. what would have given to be a fly on the wall of their worship.

[24 : 26] But now their voices are replaced by the sound of children singing, Hosanna to the Son of David. The prophecy of Psalm 8, verse 2 is being fulfilled from the lips of children and infants God is ordaining praise to sound.

We could talk far more about this, especially the response of the chief priests and teachers of the law, but the basic principle is this, Jesus Christ is now being worshipped in the temple.

Savior and salvation is receiving the praises of Israel's children. The sound of worship in the temple is now directed toward Israel's Christ. He, the new temple, is the site and focus of his people's praise.

Our worship is directed toward him and through him to God. And again, isn't this the most amazing of things? That a person replaces a building?

That the body and blood of Christ replaces the temple? Because, you know, the temple in Jerusalem was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

[25 : 40] God, but it pales into insignificance when placed beside Jesus Christ, the Son of God, through whom his people pray, in whom they find healing, and by whom they worship.

He is the Savior and salvation of all who shall come to him by faith. Perhaps this, more than anything else, is the most surprising element of the story.

not that Jesus should overturn the tables of the money changers, but that he should invite all men and women of whatever ethnicity, Jew or Gentile, to believe in him as Savior and salvation.

And my question for all of us as we close is this, is he your new temple? Is he the sight and focus of your faith?

Is he the beginning and the middle and the end of all God's purposes for you? Are your sins forgiven in his blood? And is he the one in whom all your hopes for life and through death are pinned?

[26 : 53] Let us pray. We thank you for this incredibly important passage in your word, O Lord. This passage which changes everything, which gives us confidence that salvation rests not in a building or an institution in sacrifices, ceremonies and priests, but in a person, Jesus Christ.

We worship and praise you, O Lord, today that he is your son. And that he's our savior and our salvation. We ask, O Lord, that you would help us to respond in faith and trust.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Today mixture of Honeycash and Grace■